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Hell upside down

'Oklahoma' shipmates relive Pearl Harbor

By JAMES HOFFMAN

Bill Schauf kept repeating to himself, "I could hardly believe it. You know, I could hardly believe it."

For the first time in more than 29 years Schauf, of 231 Park Ave., Albany, saw his longtime Navy buddy, Frank Scott of Sioux City, Iowa.

It was more than 33 years ago that Schauf and Scott spent 27 hours trapped in the overturned hull of the USS Oklahoma beneath the waters of Pearl Harbor.

The reunion took place Wednesday at the Albany bus terminal when Scott, who had been visiting his mother in Delaware, "pausing by en route back to the Midwest."

"I was East, for the first time in years, to help my mother celebrate her birthday and decided that, by golly, it's been too long since I've seen old Bill."

"And you know," Scott continued, "I think he knew my voice practically as soon as I said hello."

Scott and Schauf had only a few hours to reminisce before the native Iowan set out to find another buddy in Detroit.

Scott, 60, and Schauf, 60, entered the Navy in the spring of 1940 and met during training at Great Lakes, Ill.

Both were assigned to the USS Oklahoma, a battleship nearly destroyed in the bombing of Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941.

The Japanese hit the Navy's big Hawaiian base at 7:55 a.m. and, as most other veterans of the raid, each remembers where he was and what he was thinking.

Scott said he was loafing on the job that morning instead of swabbing decks, as he had been ordered, he was below deck "playing acey-deucey" with a few of his friends.

"I looked out the large porthole and I could see the big red sun on the Jap planes. Then I saw the bombs starting to fall. Before I spotted them, though, when I heard the general alarm I just asked myself, 'What in the heck are they (the U.S. Navy) doing now?' But when I saw the bombs, 'oh no.'"

Schauf said he had his dress whites on and was preparing to use his liberty time for church and island touring. "Guess I didn't make it,



Frank Scott, left, and Bill Schauf, old Navy buddies, inspect pictures of the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized at Pearl Harbor and in which both were trapped for 27 hours after the attack. (Staff photo by Fred McKinney)

though," he laughed.

"When I heard the general alarm I ran back to my battle station in the handling room."

Scott and Schauf were "powder passers" in an ammunition room during the ship's futile attempt to fight off the Japanese torpedoes, bombs and machine gun fire.

Not long after the attack had begun, while the two were at their stations, the ship overturned. Schauf, Scott and nine others hurried to the shelter of the "lucky bag," the lost and found room, and locked themselves in as protection against the spilling oil and incoming sea water.

The 11 were trapped inside the blackened, silent metal chamber for 27 hours before rescuers could penetrate their cage with an air chisel. Scott said the workers could not use a blowtorch for fear of igniting the oil.

"We could hear the (Battleship) Arizona, which was tied up right behind us—explode and we could hear the water burn. Sounded just like burning Christmas trees," he said.

More than 2,100 men died in the raid and 415 were from the Oklahoma.

The two were given one day's rest before they were assigned to the light cruiser Honolulu, which was also damaged by the Japanese.

Scott is working for the Armour Meat Co. at its packing house in Sioux City after spending more than 20 years as an aircraft painter for the Air Force.

Schauf is disabled by arthritis and doesn't work.

"We sent Christmas cards every year until a few years ago when we just lost contact. Boy, it was great seeing him, and this time I won't lose his address," Schauf said.

Frank H. Scott

State hopes for all

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